

## **VIEWERS' REACTIONS TO EXCESSIVE RITUAL THEMES IN NIGERIAN HOME VIDEOS: A PORTHARCOURT CITY SURVEY**

**GODWIN B. OKON**

Department of Mass Communication, Rivers State University of Science and Technology, PMB, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

### **ABSTRACT**

The need to streamline viewers' disposition towards the predominant portrayal of rituals, in most Nigerian home videos necessitated this study. The focus however was on ascertaining if such portrayals dovetail within the framework of construction of social reality. In other words, do the people of the southern part of Nigeria engage in rituals as a means of acquiring wealth or do they merely have proclivity for diabolism, as frequently portrayed in home videos subsumed in their socio-cultural settings? The method of study was survey with the questionnaire as the predominant instrument. The choice of Portharcourt was informed by the fact that it is a foremost cosmopolitan city in the south. A Sample size of 400 was drawn from a population of 1,837,500 using Taro Yamane's formula. Actual respondents were reached using a multi-stage cluster sampling technique. The reliability of the instrument as ascertained through Pearson's Product Moment Correlation stood at 0.89. Findings however revealed that ritual themes, as used in Nigerian home videos, did not significantly reflect the Nigerian cultural heritage. Findings further showed that their excessive use in Nigerian home videos served only to create frills and thrills in plots. A synthesis of the foregoing, however, revealed that viewers are not favourably disposed towards the excessive use of ritual themes since they inadvertently portray the Nigerian cultural heritage in the negative. To this end, it was recommended that producers of Nigerian home videos should focus more on themes that serve to construct social reality while projecting favourably the rich cultural heritage of Nigeria. In terms of contribution to knowledge, the findings of this study tend to reinforce the notion of film as a conveyor belt in cognitive constructs.

**KEYWORDS:** Disposition, Home Videos, Ritual, Social Reality, Themes

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Nigerian home video loomed into prominence in the mid 90s. It came as an alternative to Western and Indian movies and provided for the people veritable plots and settings they can at least identify with. As time went by, the home video market began to witness accelerated proliferation by movie producers with underlying notions for prospects. Interestingly, the Nigeria home video came in different genres.

A cursory observation however reveals a common strand that cuts across the conventional genre – the plot. So much intrigue is woven round the plot such that the scenes are predominantly ritualistic. Plots of people becoming rich through diabolic means and others fortifying themselves through fetish interplay held sway. Language such as “*omego*”, “*odoeshi*”, etc gained entry into the everyday lexicon of the people. From *Living in Bondage* to *Abuja connection* transcending *Issakaba*, ritual themes abound. These features no doubt characterize the average Nigerian home video.

Udofia and Tom (2013) note that Nollywood movies are now produced using digital video technology. According to them, “the release of *Living in Bondage*, a film about a businessman whose dealings with a money cult resulted in the

death of his wife, was the industry's first block buster" (p.78). They further note that since then, thousands of movies have been released.

Obviously spurred by the success story of *Living in Bondage* many movie producers ventured into movies explicit in ritual themes. Elegbe and Solako (2014) observe that Nigerian home videos are commonly viewed by individuals either at homes, schools, offices, hotels, clubhouses or viewing centers. At present, many satellite and relay stations (*Africa Magic, Nollywood*, etc) have dedicated channels for the predominant broadcast of Nigerian home videos. This is no doubt points to its growing popularity.

Nnaji (2011) opines that movies, generally, provide a special learning format that lead to unusually high retention of factual material, in comparison to the acquisition of facts in standard laboratory memory experiments. The summation here is that movies can be used to acquire information or aid teaching and learning. Owens – Ibie (1994) as cited by Elegbe and Solako (2014) equally observes that movies act as "the conscience of the state by revealing bad things, commending good things and keeping the interest of the citizenry uppermost in their agenda" (p.468). The socializing influence of home videos can no longer be in doubt.

With the proliferation of Nigerian home videos into homes coupled with their acclaimed socializing influences, one begins to wonder how the people are likely to react to the explicit ritual themes that run across many Nigerian home videos.

In a proper synthesis, in the light of this contextual discourse, Ekeanyanwu (2009) elucidates that *Nollywood* (the industry name for Nigerian home video) is expected to portray cultural sentiments in the themes of its movies/films. According to him;

To fulfill this objective, three lines of arguments are clearly distinguished. These lines of thought have emerged in the analysis of the impact of *Nollywood* on Nigerian indigenous culture, and the impact of Nigerian indigenous culture on the Nigeria movie industry. The first line of argument sees *Nollywood* as bastardizing Nigerian local cultural values, thus, impacting negatively on the Nigerian indigenous culture. The argument here is that the Nigerian cultural values are not adequately portrayed in themes of *Nollywood* movies. This is however debatable. But the truth of this argument lies in the reasons given to justify their position. The display of witchcraft, ritual killing, crass immorality etc as major prevailing themes in *Nollywood* movies is argued as not being representative of the true Nigerian indigenous society. The proponents of this view believe the Nigerian society is much more than the movies portray (p.76).

The foregoing however forms the thrust of this study. The growing popularity of Nigerian home video and the use of ritual as predominant themes elicit investigation. Such investigations will naturally border on audience reactions to these ritual themes as well as their perceived implications. Across board there is a gap in consensus. This study therefore serves to fill this gap by finding out the reactions of viewers concerning the use of ritual as central themes in Nigerian home videos.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Nigerian home videos, popularly known and referred to as Nollywood, have become household features in social settings. Many broadcast stations now air them as part of their entertainment bouquet thereby upholding their potentials for socializing influences.

Perhaps, it was in the light of the foregoing that Ekwuazi (2001) cited on Orlu- Orlu (2014) observes that the Nigerian film policy was drawn to be a “tool for international image building as well as protect, project and promote Nigeria’s rich cultural heritage and national aspiration. In the same vein, the policy thrust enjoins producers to use films as tools for national cohesion as well as serve as a vehicle for enlightenment, education, entertainment and national mobilization” (p.299). In view of the foregoing, it becomes a focus for consideration to investigate how far Nigerian home videos, in content and portrayal, have abided by these tenets.

In a related study, Ekeanyanwu (2010) ventilates that “the early *Nollywood* movies presented a stereotyped and fixated view of the Nigerian culture. They gave the impression that the Nigerian society is blood-sucking, witch-craft infested and secret-cult pervasive” (p.133). He further observes that the “government for so long deferred its film regulatory policies to the bidding of these pioneer *Nollywood* merchants. Today these merchants still call the shots on the content as well as the themes of *Nollywood* productions” (p.134).

While the above serves to offer explanations to the common strand of rituals that daily typify Nigerian home videos; it still leaves a yawning gap on viewers’ reactions and dispositions towards these ritual themes. By synthesis, therefore, this study dovetails within the framework of providing a feedback loop on viewers’ reactions to ritual themes as constantly portrayed in Nigerian home videos. In other words, how do viewers react to the use of ritual themes in Nigerian home videos? The problem of this study is therefore preconceived in the foregoing.

## OBJECTIVES

Since the Nigerian home video gained prominence, its content and portrayals have become quite contentious. It is in the light of this that this study sought to:

- Ascertain the overall disposition of viewers, resident in Port Harcourt metropolis, towards ritual themes as used in Nigerian home videos.
- Verify if these themes are a true reflection of the Nigerian cultural heritage.

## Research Questions

- How do viewers perceive ritual themes as used in Nigerian home videos?
- To what extent do these ritual themes reflect the Nigerian cultural heritage?

## Definition of Terms

**Content:** This refers to event, physical detail and information in a work of art.

**Cultural Heritage:** The way of life of a people.

**Home Video:** Films created and acted by Nigerians for use in scalar dimensions.

**Nollywood:** The Nigerian film industry

**Portrayal:** Depictions in films

**Ritual Themes:** Scenes, events and acts that show rites that border on witchcraft, voodoo etc.

## Literature Review

### Films and construction of social reality

Ebewo (2007) notes that since most of the films produced in Nigeria are viewed at home, not in theatres, they qualify to be referred to as home videos. Kunzler (2007) summaries the emergence of Nollywood as an:

Industry that developed out of a context related to domestic and international, cultural, economic and political environment. It is heterogeneous in nature and can roughly be divided into Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo video films which designate their production centres in the south-west, north and south- east of Nigeria respectively (p.1).

The account is such that Nollywood has in recent times gained widespread acceptability across the geography and demography of Nigeria. Undoubtedly, scholars; Kunzler (2007), Onuzulike (2007) and Akpabio (2007) as cited by Ewa (2011) have observed that Nollywood has significantly become involved in the process of Africa's self reflection and identity construction by means of its cultural representations.

Nollywood content, as reflected in themes, assumes a wide range. Akpabio (2007) streamlines content to cover Nigerian, African and universal issues. She notes that:

Scourge of Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF), female genital mutilation, evils of polygamy, extra marital affairs, elopement, different forms of ritual, cultism, betrayal, sibling rivalry, the activities of hired assassins and armed robbers, the spirit world, mermaid, witchcraft, workplace rivalry, incest, hypocrisy of religious leaders, sexual intercourse with housemaids and lots more (p. 38-139)

A synthesis of the forgoing would no doubt reveal preponderance for themes rooted in culture and tradition. The culture could centered nature of most Nollywood films Akpabio (2007) notes "can be argued to depict the industry as grounded on indigenous cultures like any other folk media produced and consumed by members of the group" (p.94).

In this context, Alawade and Fatoonji (2013) describe ritualism as "a wide range of traditional rites and spiritual religious activities carried out to invoke the gods for a particular course" (p.64). They further note that it involves the use of charms, magic and blood amongst others.

On the flip side of the coin, Alawade and Uduakobong (2013) have undoubtedly argued that "Nigerian cultures are revealed in the films packaged in the home videos. The story line/themes, lifestyles, foods, norms and values and even manner of dressing reveal the ways of life of the people" (p.31).

Alawade and Fantonji (2013) note that "critics and regulatory body (National Film and Video Censors Board) have severely admonished Nigerian home videos for "placing too much emphasis on what is described as negative themes which include occultism, blood corruption, sex, violence, fetishism, ritualism and other negative practices" (p.63). Nweke (2006) in an attempt to extrapolate on Nollywood content observes that:

One can have stories that talk on things like voodoo but when it is overdone and made the centre of any offering, that is when it becomes a problem because the more people see it, the more they will think that our country is all about voodoo practice (para.6).

Anyiam – Osiwe (2001) traced emphasis on negative themes by Nigerian home videos to marketers. According to her as cited in Akpabio (2007), the study found that in order to satisfy the profit orientation of these marketers, script

writers, producers and directors churn out movies focusing on themes of violence, rituals, occultism and fetishism.

The summation however is that ritual themes in Nigerian home videos can partly be attributed to the merchandizing influence of movie producers and marketers. How this plays out in terms of viewers' reactions becomes a subject of great concern.

## METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey research design was considered most appropriate for this study. Descriptive survey according to Wimmer and Dominick (2011) "attempts to describe or document current conditions or attitudes" (p.185). The justification for its use is hinged on the fact that it is a useful tool for investigating issues that border on opinion and explicit responses.

Port Harcourt metropolis, by geography and demography, formed the universe. Its population as at 2006 census stood at 1,500. With an estimated growth rate of 2.5% per annum, its present population is therefore projected to stand at 1,837,500. This in other words represents the population of the study.

Sample size however was determined using Taro Yamane's formula

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where: n = sample size

N = Population

e = 0.05

$$n = \frac{1837500}{1 + N(0.0025)}$$

$$\begin{aligned} N &= \frac{1837500}{1 + 4593.75} \\ &= \frac{837500}{4594.75} \\ &= 399.9 \\ &= 400 \end{aligned}$$

From the computation, 400 represented the sample size. Descriptively therefore a sample size of 400 was drawn from a population of 1,837,500.

Actual respondents were reached using the cluster sampling technique. This technique requires the segmentation

of a universe into zones. In a study by Okon (2011), Port Harcourt metropolis was clusterised into four zones as espoused in the table below;

**Table 1: Study Clusters**

Zone	Areas Covered
A	Elelenwo, Rumukrushu, Rumuibekwe, Woji and Rumuomasi
B	Rumuola, Rumuigbo, Rumuokoro, Mgbuogba and Elioparanwo
C	GRA, Oroazi, Mile 4, Water Lines and Presidential Estate
D	D/Line, Diobu, Amadi Flats, Ogbunabali and Trans-Amadi

The segments outlined above (Okon, 2011) have been adopted for this study. Actual respondents were reached using a multi stage sampling technique. Questionnaire was used to elicit responses from the respondents. The questionnaire was a thirteen (13) item instrument divided into two sections – A and B. While section A focused on demographic factors, section B focused on psychography. Out of the thirteen items, seven (7) were closed-ended while six (6) were open-ended. The questionnaire as self administered. Instrument validation was face and was carried out through a pretest. Reliability was done using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation. Reliability stood at 0.89.

Data analysis was however carried out using simple percentage and weighted mean score (WMS). To this end, in the light of the WMS, questions were weighted as follows:

Strongly Agree (SA)	=	5 points
Agree (A)	=	4 points
Undecided (U)	=	3 points
Disagree (D)	=	2 points
Strongly Agree (SD)	=	1 point

From this, any mean score which is equal to or more than 3.00 is positive while any mean response less than 3.00 is negative.

### Data Presentation

Four hundred (400) copies of the questionnaire were administered on respondents and three hundred and fifty (350) were duly completed and returned thereby showing a return rate of about 86%. This no doubt holds validity for the study.

**Table 2: Viewership of Nigerian Home Videos/Films**

Nature of Response	Responses in Mean Scores					WMS	Decision
	SA	A	U	D	SD		
Item 4: I have at one time or the other watched Nigerian home video/films on TV stations and personal electronic devices	1000	400	66	40	8	4.32	Affirm

Data from table 1 show that respondents have at different times watched Nigerian home videos/films. Concerning the plot and themes, table 2 shows the details.

**Table 3: Ritual Themes on Nigerian Home Videos**

Nature of Response	Responses in Mean Scores					WMS	Decision
	SA	A	U	D	SD		
Item 5: Many Nigerian home video/films that I have watched contain scenes on blood money, witchcraft, spiritism etc.	1100	400	45	20	5	4.48	Affirm

The common feature of ritual themes in Nigerian home videos was upheld. Their views on ritual scenes and themes were captured on table 3.

**Table 4: Respondents' Views on Ritual Themes**

Nature of Response	Responses in Mean Scores					WMS	Decision
	SA	A	U	D	SD		
Item 6: Ritual themes truly reflect our socio-cultural reality	300	220	210	180	75	2.81	Reject
Item 7: The scenes are often times exaggerated.	975	320	135	20	20	4.2	Affirm

From the data on table 3, respondents were of the view that these ritual themes as used in Nigerian home videos/films do not truly reflect the Nigerian socio-cultural reality. It was also the view of respondents that the depictions in ritual scenes were often exaggerated. The foregoing no doubt formed the basis for viewers' reactions towards these themes.

**Table 5: Respondents' Disposition towards Ritual Themes as Used Nigerian Home Videos**

Nature of Response	Responses in Mean Scores					WMS	Decision
	SA	A	U	D	SD		
Item 8: Ritual themes on Nigerian home videos give us an insight into what may be happening in our society	850	272	87	80	43	3.80	Affirm
Item 9: These depictions are capable of making people believe they can make money fast by killing people or by belonging to some cult groups	1050	292	150	14	10	4.33	Affirm

Data on table 4 reveal a positive tilt in the sense that respondents believe that ritual themes as used in Nigerian home videos/films do really provide an insight into what may be happening in the Nigerian society. On the other hand, it was upheld that ritual themes can potentially make people believe they can make money fast by killing people or by belonging to some cult groups. Viewers' reactions to ritual themes are further captured in table 5.

**Table 6: Respondents' Reactions**

Nature of Response	Responses in Mean Scores					WMS	Decision
	SA	A	U	D	SD		
Item 10: The use of ritual themes have led to the belief that many rich people in Nigeria today have questionable sources of income	955	216	180	52	19	4.06	Affirm
Item 11: Depictions of rituals in Nigerian home videos/films have created a stereotype that certain ethnic nationalities in Nigeria are given to fetishism and rituals	1010	284	168	34	4	4.28	Affirm

Respondents' reactions border on the fact that ritual depictions in Nigerian home video/films have affected the psyche of the average Nigerian since there is a widespread assumption that many rich people make their money through questionable means.

Worth noting also is the fact that these ritual depictions in Nigerian home video/films have led to the development and perpetuation of unwholesome stereotype about certain ethnic groupings especially the south-east and south-west.

**Table 7: Viewership in Spite of Ritual Themes**

Nature of Response	Responses in Mean Scores					WMS	Decision
	SA	A	U	D	SD		
Item 12: Despite the ritual themes, I still watch Nigerian home videos	1030	324	123	32	6	4.33	Affirm

Respondents however upheld that they still watch Nigerian home videos despite the ritual themes. Reasons for this however formed the nexus of table 13.

**Table 8: Reasons for Watching home Video/Films**

Nature of Response	Frequency	%
Information	50	14.3
Education	75	21.4
Entertainment	140	340.0
Others	85	24.3
Total	350	100

Among the reasons given by respondents for watching home videos despite their use of ritual themes was entertainment. This invariably means that Nigerian home videos serve more entertainment values than information and education.

## DISCUSSIONS

Findings reveal a general consensus in the viewership of Nigerian home video/films. This invariably means that many Nigerians watch Nigerian home videos. It was also upheld that ritual themes are common features in Nigerian home videos. This however goes to corroborate the findings of Jude and Leonard (2010) as cited in Elegbe and Salako (2014) that Nigerian home videos are inundated with contents on ritual killings, dubious acquisition of wealth and different kinds of violence.

Data further revealed that most of the ritual depictions in Nigeria home videos do not construct the Nigerian social reality. This invariably means that they do not reflect the true situation of things in Nigeria since most of the ritual themes are often times exaggerated. However, some respondents were of the view that the ritual themes as used in Nigerian home videos inadvertently provide some insight into the Nigerian socio-cultural dynamics.

Viewer reactions no doubt bordered on the probable effects of these ritual themes on cognition. It was found, in the light of the study that the disposition of many is that success stories in Nigeria today may be linked to rituals and occultism. Across board, viewers' reaction was predominantly on the negative ranging from value reorientation on "get rich quick mentality" to the entrenchment of negative stereotype about some ethnic nationalities in Nigeria.



Ironically, data revealed that in spite of these ritual themes, many people still watch Nigerian home videos/films. The reason was predominantly hinged on entertainment in contradistinction to information and education as espoused in figure 1.

The summation however is that many who watch Nigerian home video tend to use them to fill their boring moments. The meta-analysis is that Nigerian home videos/films may be lacking in information and education.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Producers of home videos/films in Nigeria should as a matter of necessity use the medium to construct the socio-cultural reality of Nigeria.
- Nigerian home videos should not be used to create or perpetuate negative stereotype about some ethnic nationalities in Nigeria.
- Besides entertainment, Nigerian home videos should try to fulfill informational and educational needs of viewers.

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